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Gary (Gary Russell) McKinney
Western Washington University

Beth Hartsoch
Western Washington University

Richard Bulcroft
Western Washington University

Linda D. (Linda Darlene) Clark
Western Washington University

Joseph E. Trimble
Western Washington University

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WESTERN EDUCATIONAL LONGITUDINAL STUDY (WELS)

BASELINE SURVEY OF FRESHMEN ENTERING IN THE FALL,
2007

REPORT 2008-07

Gary R. McKinney
Beth Hartsoch
Richard Bulcroft
Linda Clark
Joseph E. Trimble

May, 2008

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WESTERN EDUCATIONAL LONGITUDINAL STUDY (WELS) BASELINE SURVEY OF FRESHMEN ENTERING IN THE FALL, 2007

WELS BACKGROUND

The Western Educational Longitudinal Study (WELS) is a series of internal longitudinal surveys of all in-coming first-year and transfer students administered every two-three years. This study involves an initial assessment of students prior to entering Western and then a series of follow-ups at different points in their academic careers. The purpose of this study is threefold: (1) To assess student needs based on their self-reported characteristics, perceptions and concerns; (2) To provide data that can be used to better assess academic and co-curricular programs by providing baseline entry data that can be used as statistical controls in analyses to offset the inability to conduct randomized studies; and (3) To maintain an ongoing record of student knowledge acquisition, ability levels, and other general education outcomes to address concerns of accountability and accreditation.

The WELS is conducted by the Office of Survey Research (OSR) and uses a mixture of on-line and telephone survey methodologies. Since the data collected in these studies includes identifying information, these data can and are linked with data in student records, thus expanding their usefulness beyond what could be obtained using large national studies such as the National Study of Student Engagement (NSSE). Although WELS data cannot, like other national studies, be used for comparisons to other institutions, the surveys have more flexibility in content to allow them to be tailored to Western's needs.

WELS 2003 COHORT

The first WELS was administered in the summer, 2003, and included only in-coming freshmen (no transfers)¹. The baseline survey was developed as a result of meetings with various stakeholders across campus (the Provost's Office, student services, deans, the faculty senate, ATUS, etc.) as well as focus groups with students and a search for potentially useful items used on various national surveys. This baseline included 1580 out of 2225 incoming first year non-transfer students (a response rate of 71%). This cohort was then followed up at the end of their first quarter (fall, 2003: 42% response rate), the end of their first year (spring, 2004: 55% response rate), and the end of their second year (spring 2005: 70% response rate), and at the end of their third year (spring, 2006: 50% response rate). Each follow-up survey is designed to address pressing concerns about student needs, programming, and accountability and accreditation standards pertinent to the students' year in college. (For example, the first quarter follow-up of the 2003 cohort was focused on how well students make the adjustment to college; and the first and second year follow-ups focused on GURs; and the third year follow-up focused on majors.)

WELS 2005 COHORTS

A second series of WELS baseline surveys was initiated in the summer, 2005, and again included all in-coming freshmen, although this time a separate baseline survey was developed for transfer students as well. The baseline for the 2005 survey of freshmen included 1691 out of 2386 incoming students (a response rate of 71%). The baseline for the 2005 survey of transfers included 875 out of 1029 entering transfer students (a response rate of 85%). Please see below for the list of reports on these two cohorts.

CURRENT SURVEY

This report presents findings from the fall, 2007, baseline survey of entering freshmen. The sample was of all entering freshmen, with or without college credit from high school, a total of 2392 students. There were 1484 online responses, and 302 phone responses, a total of 1786 (a 75% response rate). Survey topics

¹Current definitions of the term "freshmen" include nowadays a small percentage of students who do not fit the traditional profile of a freshman. These include high school students who have earned Running Start and Advanced Placement (AP) credits. Technically, these students are entering college for the first-time, but may have earned as many as 90 college credits.

included Summerstart, logistic confidence, motivation and expectations, academic and social engagement and challenges while in high school, a current assessment of academic skills and competencies, academic priorities and study strategies, and issues related to health, wellness, and alcohol use.

To find out more about previous surveys of the 2003 freshmen WELS cohort, see the following reports:

Western Educational Longitudinal Study (Report No. 2003-02).

Western Educational Longitudinal Study: Fall 2003 Freshmen Transition Survey. Focus: A Research Summary, 8, (4), 1-8.

Western Educational Longitudinal Study: Spring, 2004, Follow-up of Freshmen Entering Fall, 2003 (Report No. 2004-01).

Western Educational Longitudinal Study (WELS): Spring, 2005, Follow-up of Freshmen Entering Fall, 2003 (Report No. 2006-01).

Western Educational Longitudinal Study (WELS): Spring, 2006, Follow-up of Freshmen Entering Fall, 2003 (Report No. 2008-01).

Western Educational Longitudinal Study (WELS): Spring, 2007, Follow-up of Freshmen Entering Fall, 2003 (Report No. 2008-04).

To find out more about previous surveys of the 2005 freshmen and transfer WELS cohorts see the following reports:

Western Educational Longitudinal Study (WELS) Fall, 2005, Baseline Survey of In-coming Transfers (Report No. 2006-02).

Western Educational Longitudinal Study (WELS): Fall, 2005, Baseline Survey of In-coming Freshmen (Report No. 2006-03).

Western Educational Longitudinal Study (WELS) Freshmen in Transition: Fall Quarter, 2005, In-coming Freshmen Surveyed at the End of Fall Quarter, 2005 (Report 2006-04).

Western Educational Longitudinal Study (WELS) Transfers in Transition: Fall Quarter, 2005, In-coming Transfers Surveyed at the End of Fall Quarter, 2005 (Report 2006-05).

Western Educational Longitudinal Study (WELS) Spring, 2006, Follow-up Survey of Students Who Had Entered as Transfers in the Fall, 2005 (Report 2008-02).

Western Educational Longitudinal Study (WELS) Spring, 2006, Follow-up Survey of Students Who Had Entered as Freshmen in the Fall, 2005 (Report 2008-03).

Western Educational Longitudinal Study (WELS) Spring, 2007, Follow-up Survey of Students Who Had Entered as Transfers in the Fall, 2005 (Report 2008-05).

Western Educational Longitudinal Study (WELS) Spring, 2007, Follow-up Survey of Students Who Had Entered as Freshmen in the Fall, 2005 (Report 2008-06).

SUMMERSTART

Did you attend Summerstart? (N=1488. Online version only.)

	Yes	No
	99%	1%

For those who attended Summerstart: Western is considering the expansion of Summerstart to two days in order to give students more time to think about their course options before registering. What do you think if this idea? (N=1465)

Much less appealing	11%
Somewhat less appealing	15%
Neither more nor less appealing	17%
Somewhat more appealing	33%
Much more appealing	25%

Would you have been less likely to attend Summerstart this year if it had been two days instead of one? (N=1471)

	Yes	No
	28%	72%

For those who attended Summerstart: Prior to attending Summerstart, to what extent did you do each of the following? For those who did not attend Summerstart: To what extent have you done each of the following to help you prepare for your first quarter at Western? (N=1488. Online version only.)

	Not at all	Very little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	A lot
Visited the Academic Advising Center website	45%	22%	23%	8%	1%
Visited the Academic Advising Center in person	76%	13%	7%	2%	1%
Read about Western's academic requirements in the University Catalog	17%	17%	33%	23%	11%
Familiarized yourself with the idea of academic credits at Western and how they apply to building a schedule of classes	15%	20%	33%	22%	10%
Read about at least one possible major field in the University Catalog	12%	11%	27%	28%	22%
Looked through the list of courses in the University Catalog	15%	13%	26%	28%	19%
Identified courses you might want to take using either the University Catalog, the Degree Planning Guide, or WWU Classfinder.	19%	12%	22%	27%	20%
Obtained information about majors or courses from sources other than the University Catalog or Classfinder	25%	23%	27%	16%	9%

CONFIDENCE

How confident would you say you are about each of the following? (N=1488. Online version only.)

Table shows percent who responded "Not applicable" versus those who gave another response ("Applicable"), and then a breakdown of responses for those who gave an "Applicable" response.

	N/A	Applicable	Not at all	Very little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	A lot
Understanding of how to use Classfinder and the online Timetable to help you plan classes	5	1481	2%	8%	28%	34%	28%
Ability to select the right classes	8	1474	1%	11%	40%	31%	16%
Ability to retrieve personal and registration information from Web4U	19	1460	1%	9%	28%	35%	27%
Ability to add and drop classes using Web4U	18	1457	2%	7%	22%	36%	32%
Ability to find the information you need from the University Catalog	11	1461	1%	11%	36%	34%	19%
Ability to find the resources you need on campus to plan your academic career	14	1458	2%	18%	42%	25%	13%
Ability to interpret and understand the General University Requirements (if applicable)	64	1410	1%	10%	33%	35%	20%
Understanding of how to track your GUR progress (if applicable) using the Degree Planning Guide	72	1405	7%	20%	32%	24%	17%
Understanding of the way that general and major-specific advising works at Western	12	1464	7%	25%	42%	18%	9%

EDUCATION PLANS

How likely is it that you will transfer from Western to another college or university before you graduate? (N=1786)

Extremely unlikely	26%
Very unlikely	30%
Somewhat unlikely	13%
Uncertain	18%
Somewhat likely	9%
Very likely	2%
Extremely likely	2%

How long do you think it will take you to finish your bachelor's degree (not including any teaching or other additional internships that you might need to graduate)? (N=1784)

Less than 4 years	12%
Exactly 4 years	49%
4-5 years	31%
5 or more years	1%
Don't know	8%

MOTIVATION

Compared to attending college this fall, how much would you have preferred to be... (N=1786)

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	A lot	Quite a lot	A great deal
taking time off from school?	46%	27%	18%	5%	2%	1%	1%
going to school at a community college?	77%	12%	7%	2%	1%	0%	0%

EXPECTATIONS

Below is a list of statements about the student culture at Western. Please read each statement and tell us to what extent you agree or disagree that each is true based on impressions you have formed thus far. (N=1786)

	Strongly disagree	2	3	Neither agree nor disagree	4	5	Strongly agree
Life in the residence halls is clearly separate from life in the classroom.	2%	6%	13%	38%	21%	13%	8%
There is a lot of drinking and pot smoking (or other drug use) at Western.	5%	12%	11%	39%	21%	8%	4%
Many students at Western have friendships with others of different race/ethnicity.	1%	1%	2%	20%	24%	26%	25%

EXPECTATIONS (Cont.)

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about how to succeed at Western? (N=1786)

	Strongly disagree	2	3	Neither agree nor disagree	4	5	Strongly agree
In order to succeed at Western a student needs to do at least 2 hours of work for every hour that they have of class time.	2%	4%	9%	27%	26%	19%	14%
To do their best, a student needs to complete all assigned readings before each class when they are due.	1%	1%	4%	8%	25%	28%	33%
Participating in a lot of outside activities during the days prior to an exam should not interfere with doing well on the exam.	5%	12%	18%	29%	18%	12%	6%
It's possible to occasionally skip class and still do your best in a course.	8%	16%	17%	23%	24%	9%	3%
To do well in a course all you need is to do the minimum work required.	32%	34%	20%	10%	2%	1%	1%
It is important to plan and start assignments weeks before they are due.	2%	3%	11%	24%	26%	18%	15%

Thinking about the upcoming school year, how concerned are you about each of the following? (N=1786)

	Not concerned	2	3	4	5	6	Extremely concerned
Being able to attend all your classes regularly.	43%	30%	9%	7%	6%	3%	3%
Meeting family expectations for, or interference with, your academic work.	32%	24%	15%	11%	9%	6%	3%
Fitting in with others and making friends at Western.	24%	19%	16%	15%	13%	8%	5%
Managing stress and other sources of emotional upset.	10%	16%	17%	18%	19%	12%	7%

HIGH SCHOOL ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT - ACADEMIC

During your senior year in high school (including any community college classes you may have taken during that time), to what extent would you say that you did each of the following? (N=1786)

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	A lot	Quite a lot	A great deal
Asked instructors to give you comments or criticisms about your work.	5%	16%	25%	20%	17%	10%	7%
Approached a teacher for help whenever you had difficulties in a course.	2%	10%	17%	21%	22%	14%	13%
Formed friendships based on shared academic activities or interests.	3%	8%	17%	19%	21%	15%	16%
If there was material you didn't understand, you asked about it in class.	2%	9%	18%	22%	20%	16%	12%
Talked about course material you were learning with someone else other than a teacher.	1%	6%	14%	21%	23%	18%	17%

To what extent were you involved in academic clubs when you were in high school (e.g., language clubs, fine arts, honors society, etc.)? (N=1780)

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	A lot	Quite a lot	A great deal
	10%	19%	20%	16%	12%	12%	12%

HIGH SCHOOL SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT - SOCIAL

During your senior year in high school, to what extent did you spend your time engaged in each of the following activities outside of school? (N=1786)

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	A lot	Quite a lot	A great deal
Participating in organized family activities (recreational, religious, dining, etc.).	5%	20%	24%	18%	14%	11%	9%
Recreational internet use and computer/video game playing.	7%	20%	22%	19%	14%	9%	9%
Reading books for personal enjoyment.	9%	21%	23%	18%	12%	8%	9%
Recreational television watching.	9%	28%	26%	18%	11%	6%	3%

HIGH SCHOOL CHALLENGES

Senior year challenges. (N=1786)

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	A lot	Quite a lot	A great deal
During your senior year in high school how much difficulty did you have balancing the time and other demands of family, friends, school, and/or your workplace?	13%	34%	32%	11%	6%	4%	1%
To what extent would you say that you had difficulty meeting the expectations and obligations of your parents or other family members during your senior year in high school?	33%	35%	17%	7%	4%	2%	1%

On a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 is "Never" and 7 is "Almost Always", how often would you say you felt each of the following ways during your senior year in high school? (N=1786)

	Never	2	3	4	5	6	Almost Always
Overwhelmed with academic work and other responsibilities?	5%	19%	25%	23%	18%	7%	3%

HIGH SCHOOL HEALTH AND WELLNESS

During your senior year in high school how many days during a typical week would you say you...
(N=1786)

	One or fewer	2	3	4	5	6	Almost Daily
got less than 8 hours of sleep?	11%	15%	15%	16%	21%	7%	15%
got at least 30 minutes of planned exercise?	15%	12%	16%	12%	16%	6%	23%

ACADEMIC SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES

Please try to compare yourself to all other first-year college students across the country. Also, please try to provide an honest assessment of your knowledge and abilities that is specific to the area referred to, rather than an overall impression of yourself. (N=1786)

	Well below average	Somewhat below average	Slightly below average	About average	Slightly above average	Somewhat above average	Well above average
Writing skills and effectiveness.	0%	1%	6%	24%	29%	29%	10%
Oral communication and public speaking skills.	1%	5%	13%	30%	22%	20%	9%
Ability to critically evaluate written information.	0%	2%	8%	32%	29%	20%	8%
Ability to define research or analysis problems in such a way that you can see clearly what steps you need to take to solve them.	0%	2%	9%	38%	28%	18%	5%
Ability to work and learn independently without being given directions.	0%	1%	6%	23%	29%	28%	13%
Ability to work cooperatively in a group, no matter who is in it, to successfully solve problems.	0%	1%	3%	22%	29%	29%	15%
Ability to understand and apply formal scientific principles and methods to solve problems.	1%	5%	14%	34%	25%	17%	5%
Ability to understand and apply quantitative or mathematical/statistical principles and methods to solve problems.	2%	8%	17%	28%	20%	17%	8%
Knowledge and understanding of different cultures and philosophies.	0%	2%	11%	30%	24%	21%	11%
Knowledge and understanding of how humans impact the environment.	0%	1%	5%	29%	28%	24%	13%
Ability to work effectively with technology, especially computers.	1%	2%	9%	32%	25%	20%	12%
Leadership skills and the ability to manage the work of others.	0%	1%	6%	24%	27%	27%	15%
Knowledge of the dynamics of social relationships and organizations.	0%	1%	6%	31%	30%	23%	10%
Ability to use library resources, such as reference books, online databases, special collections and others sources.	0%	2%	8%	36%	26%	20%	8%
Ability to organize the results of library research into a research paper.	0%	2%	8%	32%	29%	21%	8%
Knowledge and understanding of plagiarism and your ability to avoid it.	0%	0%	2%	20%	21%	26%	30%

ACADEMIC PRIORITIES

To what extent would you say each of the following statements accurately describes your approach and your work in academic courses? (N=1786)

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	A lot	Quite a lot	A great deal
I prefer material that really challenges me so I can learn new things.	0%	4%	24%	26%	21%	16%	9%
It is important to me that I get better grades than most other students.	7%	13%	26%	17%	16%	14%	6%
The most satisfying thing for me in a course is trying to understand the content as thoroughly as possible regardless of what grade I get.	2%	9%	23%	21%	19%	14%	11%
The most important thing for me right now is my overall grade point average, so my main concern in my classes is getting good grades.	4%	14%	27%	21%	16%	11%	7%

To what extent would you agree or disagree that each of the following is a true or accurate statement about the kind of person you are? (N=1774)

	Strongly disagree	2	3	Neither agree nor disagree	4	5	Strongly agree
When a course is difficult, I tend to give up or only study the easy parts.	33%	32%	14%	12%	7%	1%	1%
I work hard to do well in a class even if I do not like what we are doing.	1%	4%	10%	13%	30%	25%	18%
I'm certain I can master the skills being taught in my classes.	0%	2%	7%	20%	33%	25%	12%
I always expect that I will to do very well in my classes.	1%	4%	8%	20%	33%	23%	11%

STUDY STRATEGIES

The following statements have to do with the way you approach your classes and study for important exams. When you are taking classes, to what extent do you... (N=1786)

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	A lot	Quite a lot	A great deal
find yourself thinking about other things and as a result miss important points being made in class or in a reading?	4%	36%	32%	15%	8%	3%	1%
ask yourself questions to make sure you understand the material you have been reading or studying in a class?	2%	15%	29%	27%	18%	6%	2%
try to do school work on your own, without help from anyone, even if you are having trouble learning the material?	3%	16%	29%	24%	15%	9%	4%
ask a student in your class for help when you don't understand something?	1%	7%	21%	30%	22%	13%	5%
work with others from a class to complete your individual assignments?	5%	22%	27%	22%	15%	7%	2%
find it hard to stick to a study schedule?	11%	28%	25%	14%	11%	6%	4%
go through the readings and your class notes and try to find the most important ideas?	2%	8%	20%	28%	23%	13%	6%
make sure you kept up with the weekly readings and assignments?	0%	4%	16%	21%	23%	20%	16%

ALCOHOL USE: DEFINITION OF "ONE DRINK"

This special section of the survey was added for the Office of Prevention and Wellness at Western and focuses on incoming students' recent use of alcohol and their perceptions about how much other students entering Western typically use alcohol.

These question asked about alcohol use over the past month and reported in terms of the "number of alcoholic drinks" consumed. The following equivalencies constituted "one drink":

10 ounces of standard brand beer, ale, or lager (5% Alcohol)

8 ounces of microbrew, or malt beer/liquor (6% Alcohol)

8 ounces of wine cooler or hard lemonade (6% Alcohol)

4 ounces of wine (12% Alcohol)

1 ounce of 100 proof liquor - straight up or mixed

ALCOHOL USE

When was the last time that you had an alcoholic drink? (N=1737)

Never	33%
Within the past month	42%
1-3 month ago	14%
More than three months ago	11%

Thinking back to the occasions when you drank alcohol over the past month, choose the one occasion when you had the most to drink. On that occasion, how many one drink equivalents did you have? Also, on this occasion, how many hours did you spend drinking the above number of drinks? (N=737. Responses of "less than one" recoded as 0.5.)

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Number of drinks	6.1	4.2
Number of hours	3.2	2.0

On a given weekend evening during the past month, how much alcohol did you typically drink? Also, how many hours did you spend drinking the above number of drinks? (N=737. Responses of "less than one" recoded as 0.5.)

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Number of drinks	3.5	2.2
Number of hours	2.6	2.0

ALCOHOL USE (Cont.)

On how many days during the past month did you have at least one alcoholic drink? (N = 737)

1-2 Days	37%
3-5 Days	34%
6-9 Days	15%
10-14 Days	7%
15-19 Days	4%
20-24 Days	2%
25-29 Days	1%
All 30 Days	0%

Thinking about the occasions when you have used alcohol in the past three months, how often did you do each of the following? (N = 977. Table shows number responding "not applicable," and number who chose another response—"applicable"—and then a breakdown by response.)

	N/A	Applicable	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always
Switch between alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages.	67	747	11%	18%	24%	29%	18%
Determine in advance not to exceed a set number of drinks.	39	766	16%	14%	17%	23%	30%
Choose not to drink alcohol.	34	777	5%	9%	46%	35%	6%
Use a designated driver.	116	696	3%	1%	7%	12%	76%
Eat before and/or during drinking.	27	786	1%	3%	18%	41%	37%
Have a friend let you know when you've had enough.	109	703	16%	14%	18%	24%	28%
Keep track of how many drinks you were having.	33	781	4%	9%	13%	27%	47%
Pace your drinks to one or fewer per hour.	62	751	15%	26%	26%	17%	15%
Avoid playing drinking games.	71	745	20%	23%	23%	17%	17%
Drink an alcohol look-alike (non-alcoholic beer, punch) or juice, water.	81	732	37%	18%	27%	11%	6%

ALCOHOL USE (Cont.)

Thinking about the occasions when you have used alcohol in the past three months, how many times did the following things happen to you during those times? (N=977. Table shows number responding "not applicable," and number who chose another response—"applicable"—and then a breakdown by response.

	N/A	Applicable	Never	1-2 times	3-5 times	6-10 times	11 or more times
Got into a fight, acted badly, or did mean things.	21	794	87%	12%	1%	0%	0%
Missed out on other things because you spent too much money on alcohol.	25	791	96%	4%	1%	0%	0%
Caused shame or embarrassment to someone.	23	792	85%	14%	1%	0%	0%
Neglected your responsibilities.	22	789	82%	15%	3%	0%	0%
Felt like you needed more alcohol than you used to use in order to get the same effect.	23	791	84%	10%	4%	1%	0%
Suddenly found yourself in a place that you could not remember getting to.	21	793	86%	11%	2%	1%	0%
Passed out or fainted suddenly.	22	795	91%	8%	1%	0%	0%
Had a fight, argument, or bad feelings with a friend.	22	794	82%	16%	2%	0%	0%
Kept drinking when you promised yourself not to.	24	791	89%	10%	1%	0%	0%
Drove a motor vehicle after having more than two drinks.	21	791	85%	11%	3%	1%	0%
Had a hangover the morning after you had been drinking.	20	792	53%	37%	7%	2%	1%
Felt sick to your stomach or thrown up after drinking.	21	796	58%	35%	6%	1%	0%

PERCEPTIONS OF ALCOHOL USE BY WWU STUDENTS

Even though respondents may not have yet met any Western students, they were asked about their assumptions about what they will be like. Responses were based on the same equivalencies as in the previous section.

Over the course of the past month, how many "drinks" of alcohol do you think a typical Western student consumed each day of a typical week? (N=1737)

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Monday	0.7	1.2
Tuesday	0.7	1.2
Wednesday	0.9	1.4
Thursday	1.3	1.9
Friday	4.3	2.8
Saturday	4.7	2.9
Sunday	1.6	2.2

On how many days during a typical month do you think a typical Western student has at least one alcoholic drink? (N=1711)

Never	2%
Less than once	2%
1-2 Days	9%
3-5 Days	23%
6-9 Days	33%
10-14 Days	19%
15-19 Days	8%
20-24 Days	3%
25-29 Days	0%
All 30 Days	0%

Using the same equivalencies as before, how many "drinks" of alcohol do you think a typical Western student consumes on a given occasion? Also, using the same equivalencies as before, how many "drinks" of alcohol do you think a typical Western student consumes on a given occasion? (N=1700)

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Number of drinks	4.5	2.6
Number of hours	3.2	1.6